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Keys-Turner Overseeing TSA in Northern Michigan

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Keys-Turner Overseeing TSA in Northern Michigan

After working for the Transportation Security Administration since its inception, Karen Keys-Turner has reached a top field position with the agency as Federal Security Director for nine Northern Michigan airports.

Keys-Turner is a 2011 graduate of the Naval Postgraduate School Center for Homeland Defense and Security.

As Federal Security Director Keys-Turner is the on-site, ranking authority for security operations at Cherry Capital Airport in Traverse City, Mich., and eight "spoke" airports in the region that feed into that location; six of those are located on the state's remote Upper Peninsula.

Broadly, the FSD position's duties include:

- Organizing and implementing the Federal Security Crisis Management Response Plan,
- Implementation, performance and enhancement of security and screening standards for airport employees and passengers
- Oversight of passenger, baggage, and air cargo security screening
- Airport security risk assessments
- Security technology implementation and maintenance within established guidelines
- Crisis management
- Data and communications network protection and recovery as it impacts on federal security responsibilities
- Employee security awareness training
- Coordination of Federal law enforcement activities within the purview of the FSD and TSA
- Collaboration and coordination with federal, state, and local emergency services and law enforcement

The job is compliance-oriented as it relates to airport operations and equally management-focused in terms of engaging and supporting operations and staff at nine separate sites. The area is rich with diverse homeland security concerns such as the historic Mackinac Bridge, a myriad of waterways and the nearby Canadian border, Keys-Turner said.

"The major challenges are coordinating and working with nine sets of stakeholders and law enforcement jurisdictions because of having responsibility for a number of small operations that are so geographically dispersed," she added.

Another challenge is ensuring compliant staffing levels at the smaller airports, some of which have seasonal fluctuations of air traffic, and the many weather-related irregular operations that come with Michigan winters, she added.

The TSA exercises with Customs and Border Protection and the Coast Guard in the vicinity and one benefit of her CHDS education is the fostering of interagency collaboration the job requires. She was one of six TSA graduates in her cohort.

"Our cohort had a large TSA contingent and a lot of those folks touch my life daily," she noted.

As a student at CHDS, Keys-Turner earned the Philip Zimbardo Award, named in honor of renowned psychologist and former Center instructor. Her thesis, "Understanding the Violent Islamist Radicalization Process: A Framework for Understanding," outlined models of extremists' paths to violent ideology and recommended a counter-radicalization policy that develops expertise in combating such actors. With the region's numerous outdoor festivals and events during the tourism season there are concerns about active shooters and potential domestic terrorism.

Along with seasonal public events Keys-Turner said she finds herself often referring to the Center's Critical Infrastructure Protection course and the strategies discussed and debated during that class and how that course relates to the TSA's risk-based security strategy.

"One of the things I go back to is reading the book 'The Edge of Disaster' by Stephen Flynn and the concept of resilience. That concept resounds in terms of the challenges here," she said. "In terms of strategic management, a focus here will be developing



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and implementing processes and procedures that are sustainable and lend to the resilience of the operations. The knowledge I gained in the CHDS Master's program comes into play daily as I grow into my new role."

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